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Message Text

SECRET

PAGE 01 TEL AV 12114 101652Z
ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W
----------075582 101706Z /46
O 101634Z SEP 78 ZFF-4
FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
TO SECSTATE WASHDC NIACT IMMEDIATE 5402
INFO AMEMBASSY BEIRUT IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS IMMEDIATE
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM IMMEDIATE
USMISSION USUN NEW YORK IMMEDIATE

S E C R E T TEL AVIV 12114

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PEPR, IS, LE, SY, UN
SUBJECT: NORTH LEBANON
REF: STATE 229141

1. AFTER OUR DISCUSSION ON SOUTH LEBANON REPORTED SEPTEL, GAZIT MOVED TO EVENTS IN THE NORTH. ALTHOUGH HE WENT THROUGH FAMILIAR ISRAELI DESCRIPTION OF SYRIAN INTENTION TO BREAK MILITARY AND POLITICAL POWER OF MARONITE MILI-TIAS, GAZIT WAS MUCH MORE CONCERNED IN HIS REMARKS WITH SYRIAN ACTIONS IN LEBANESE AIRSPACE.

2. HE STRESSED SYRIA WAS VIOLATING A FIVE-YEAR-OLD DE FACTO AGREEMENT WITH GOI TO REGARD LEBANESE AIRSPACE AS "FREE" AIRSPACE FOR BOTH SYRIAN AND ISRAELI AIRCRAFT. ISRAEL COULD NOT ACCEPT SYRIAN ATTEMPTS TO TRY TO STOP ISRAELI RECONNAISSANCE FLIGHTS OVER LEBANON. GAZIT SAID, "IF IT HAD NOT BEEN FOR CAMP DAVID, WE WOULD HAVE HAD AN AIR CLASH OVER LEBANON LONG AGO." BECAUSE OF THE SUMMIT, THE GOI HAD AVOIDED IN THE LAST TEN DAYS RECONNAISSANCE FLIGHTS NORTH OF BEIRUT. BUT THAT WOULD

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NOT GO ON MUCH PAST CAMP DAVID, AND GOI HAD DEFINITE INFORMATION THAT SYRIAN PILOTS HAD ORDERS TO INTERCEPT ISRAELI AIRCRAFT NORTH OF BEIRUT. INDEED, SYRIANS SEEMED TO BE LOOKING FOR A FIGHT AND ISRAELI PILOTS WERE EAGER TO OBLIGE.

3. GAZIT SAID THAT IF ISRAELI AIRCRAFT FLEW NORTH OF

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BEIRUT TODAY, THERE WOULD UNDOUBTEDLY BE A CLASH. THROUGH THIS ACTION, THE SYRIANS HAD ALREADY CROSSED THE "RED LINE" WITH REGARD TO LEBANESE AIR SPACE. IF THE SYRIANS PERSISTED, THE ONLY QUESTION WAS WHEN THE AIR BATTLE OVER LEBANON WOULD TAKE PLACE, NOT IF. IN RESPONSE TO MY QUESTION, GAZIT SAID THAT IN LAST WEEK SYRIAN AIRCRAFT HAD CROSSED OVER INTO LEBANESE AIRSPACE.

4. I WENT OVER POINTS IN REFTEL AND URGED FURTHER RESTRAINT ON PART OF GOI. GAZIT'S ANSWER WAS TO ASK IF WE HAD YET RECEIVED REPLY FROM ASSAD TO SECRETARY'S MESSAGE. MY NEGATIVE RESPONSE, ALTHOUGH SUITABLY EMBELLISHED, DID NOTHING TO INCREASE GAZIT'S SYMPATHY FOR U.S. CONCERNS OVER DEVELOPMENTS IN LEBANON. VIETS

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